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The Impossible Question

"Why and what to perform?" is a question we find ourselves asking anew with every new performance. It is as if you are asking it for the first time, even though you have answered it umpteen times before. This game needs to be played unto the death. And it is precisely in this that the biggest pangs of anguish and pleasure of performing lies.

The minute you start insisting on a particular answer, defense, conviction, method, concept ..., you are caught up in your own trap. You start using the stage as an asylum, a haven in which you fall into the trap of playing a trick on yourself, in turn also playing a trick on the audience with the performance. There is an audience who enjoys that. Many do indeed come to the theatre as if it were an asylum in which questions of what and why don’t need to be asked. And therefore there are many such performances. And then there is even more of this type of audience. And so theatre then becomes jaded, old-hat and boring ...

With every performance, therefore, we keep asking "What and Why?" for as long as it takes for us to plumb virtually every meaning; to clear away all of the rational, conceptual and ideological drudgery getting in the way – until we are left purely with the basic sound of the stage. For Via Negativa, this is the whole point of creating the performance: it is only when we feel we are getting close to something that can no longer be rationalized, and when we no longer have to pretend we understand something we do not – it is only at this point that we feel we become real.

But this is not some kind of irrational surfing, aimless improvisation, emotional unshackling or some such. On the contrary: If you want to occupy a space behind the seal of reason, you must first go through many filters of reasoning. This is a thick web of stereotypes, prejudices, conventions, presuppositions and expectations, references, paradoxes ... We are talking about an astutely rational process here. The stage is the last lens that the gaze travels through. A zoom-in on the question "What and Why?". The stage is a situation of a sharpened focus: we are ready to see what is impossible to show. The silent agreement between we who are showing and you who are watching is: We know that what is between us here is here only so as to open up a space for what is hidden behind us.

The question "What and Why?" is constantly hanging over our heads. In fact, this is an impossible question about meaning. We all know there is no answer. And we all know that someone has to keep asking it. We all know this is a pointless but necessary exercise. That is the privilege of the stage, its only purpose.